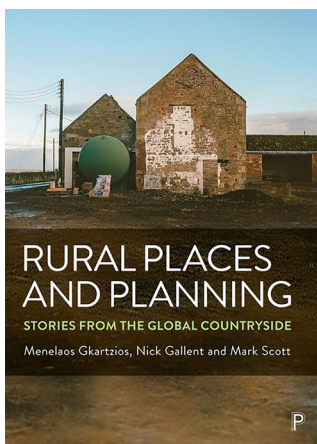


Gkartzios, Menelaos; Gallent, Nick; Scott, Mark (2022): Rural Places and Planning. Stories from the Global Countryside

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In the constantly changing field of spatial research and planning, the complex dynamics of rural areas have become a central focus of academic interest. “Rural Places and Planning: Stories from the Global Countryside” by Menelaos Gkartzios, Nick Gallent and Mark Scott provides a thorough analysis of the dynamics that shape rural areas and the planning strategies developed to tackle their unique challenges. This volume is a valuable extension of the previously edited book by the same authors (Scott/Gallent/Gkartzios 2019).

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Scholars and practitioners are increasingly turning their attention to rural areas, as the discourse of global spatial studies expands beyond traditional urban-centric perspectives. In this context, Menelaos Gkartzios, Nick Gallent and Mark Scott present a comprehensive examination of the challenges and opportunities specific to rural planning by shedding light on the social, economic and environmental dimensions that shape rural spaces. Their aim is to introduce “rural planning as a discipline in its own right” (p. 3) rather than as an extension of urban planning.

The significance of “Rural Places and Planning” becomes apparent when looking at the current research landscape. Discussions on topics such as good countryside (Shucksmith 2018), place making (Cresswell 2009), rural idyll (Halfacree 1996), rural populism (Rodriguez-Pose 2018), global countryside (Woods 2007) and (vanishing) social places (Kersten/Neu/Vogel 2022) are taken up by the authors. The book not only engages with established theoretical frameworks but also draws on 12 illustrative case studies from diverse global contexts. This approach is in line with the wider trend in spatial research, which emphasises the importance of context-specific analysis in the global countryside and recognises the inherent variability of rural planning challenges.

The book is divided into three parts. The introduction covers theoretical approaches to planning and rural areas and explains the methodological approach. The main empirical section discusses 12 case studies, divided into four sections. The conclusion draws on lessons learned for rural planning. The book features numerous illustrations of the case studies, which, however, do not always appear to full effect when printed in black and white.

In the introduction, the authors reference three influential scholars whose concepts they have incorporated to for-

mulate the overall perspective of the volume. They mention Shucksmith's (2018) concept of the good countryside, Woods' (2007) exploration of the global countryside, and, most characteristic, Bourdieu's (1986) notions of place capitals. Building on these foundational contributions, the authors present an outlook on rural areas in order to "deconstruct rural places into their elemental capitals" (p. 4). Instead of concentrating on planning systems or processes, this viewpoint emphasises the four fundamental components or 'capitals' that are inherent to rural places: the built rural, the economic rural, the land-based rural, and the social and cultural rural. Planning is considered "both an *idea* and a diverse *practice*" (p. 17) and, as a process of place governance, enables "better places" to be co-created (p. 17).

This perspective is applied to the "*stories*" (p. 22) narrated in 12 local case studies from the global countryside, which are structured by the four Bourdieu-inspired capitals. The built rural centres on infrastructures, recognising that the use of the word infrastructure "to denote the sum of built capital is at once correct and also excessively vague" (p. 25). The first case study examines neighbourhood planning in northern England, which has been affected by housing stress. The second example explores the emergence of smart villages in Finland. The third case study discusses a cooperative community space located in a petrol station and roadhouse in Australia. The case of cooperative provision of digital infrastructure in Finland exemplifies non-profit-oriented management of such services. However, the outstanding number of "36,000 hours of voluntary work" (p. 36) could also serve as a warning example of how public tasks in rural areas are offloaded to residents.

The economic rural is divided into physical productive infrastructure, enterprise infrastructure and community wealth-building capacity. It is considered "a means to enhance rural quality of life and wellbeing" (p. 49), rather than a sole purpose in itself. The case studies narrate heritage-led rural development in Norway and the rich natural resources in the US Appalachian Region as economic pathways. In contrast, the third example in this section serves as a deterrent. It illustrates the financialised leaseback-model used by a subsidiary of the Netherlands-based Rabobank, known as Rabo Farm. This model resulted in the land grabbing of farmland in Romania and the emergence of mafia-linked landowners and mayors. While the authors acknowledge the negative consequences for the region, they primarily attribute them to weak governance practices rather than to the financialised model itself.

In the chapter on land-based rural areas, the authors emphasise the "need for a more holistic framework" (p. 73) for sustainable land resource management. The transition to a low-carbon future in the structurally weak Irish Midlands is discussed as an attempt at "just transition" (p. 78)

as part of climate action. The case study on payment for ecosystem services illustrates the significant potential of this instrument. China's Sloping Land Conversion Program aims to convert over 28 million hectares of cropland and wasteland into forests by compensating farmers with cash, grain and tree seedlings. The authors explain how this rural planning instrument was transformed from a former top-down approach with negative results, such as monoculture forests, to a program that meets local needs through "participatory land management approaches" (p. 86).

The final chapter examines the social and cultural aspects of rural areas. Case studies of an art festival in Japan, rural resilience during COVID-19 in Spain, and Queer lives in rural Canada demonstrate that "social and cultural capital matter in the 'idea and practice' of rural planning, because they put people, their relationships and their immaterial assets at the heart of place-making" (p. 121).

The concluding section of the book outlines a number of lessons from the case studies, highlighting key factors that are central to ensuring replicability in different settings, with a focus on the interplay between planning and communities – all with the "ambition of making *future rural places*" (p. 123) and answering Shucksmith's question about the good countryside. The lessons learned emphasise guiding values such as environmental and spatial justice, embedded identity and participation with the aim of "strengthening, mutually reinforcing interrelationships across all four capitals" (p. 129). The book provides compelling evidence for planners and stakeholders, highlighting the importance of an equitable approach to planning for rural areas. The authors' work is characterised by impressive literature and concise case studies. However, this brevity is also a weakness of the book as the exact role played by rural planning in the individual projects is not always clear from these few pages. Nonetheless, the authors' claim to provide various glimpses of good outcomes is thoroughly fulfilled because, last but not least: "There is no simple path to the 'good countryside'" (p. 127).

Full reference of reviewed title:

Gkartzios, Menelaos; Gallent, Nick; Scott, Mark (2022): Rural Places and Planning. Stories from the Global Countryside. Bristol – Bristol University Press. Figures, Tables, Boxes, 175 pages.

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